

Syllabus for CT 665 Systematic Theology
Fall 2015
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COURSE DESCRIPTION:

An examination of the doctrines of the Christian church, with an emphasis on seeing their relations to each other. The purpose of the course will be to learn to reflect critically on these doctrines in order to appropriate them understandably in our contemporary situation. Students will be asked to articulate their understanding of the Christian faith in a comprehensive statement at the end of the term.

OBJECTIVES:

- 1) To deepen understanding of traditional Christian theological loci
- 2) To begin to draw out implications of adopting a theological point of view
- 3) To continue to develop critical thinking skills
- 4) To continue to develop writing skills
- 5) To begin to develop one's own coherent understanding of the Christian faith

TEXTS:

Tyron Inbody, *The Faith of the Christian Church*

In addition to the above, each student will be required to read one of the following texts:

Anne E. Carr, *Transforming Grace: Christian Tradition and Women's Experience*

James H. Evans, Jr., *We Have Been Believers: An African-American Systematic Theology*

Ted Peters, *God—The World's Future*

Amos Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity*

Frances Young, *God's Presence: A Contemporary Recapitulation of Early Christianity*

ASSIGNMENTS:

Each student will be required to do the following:

Write two short papers three to four pages in length.

Write a final paper twenty-five pages in length.

Participate in a group report on supplemental reading.

Come to each class with a list of questions or issues to discuss.

Write a paragraph of reflection each week on issues raised by the additional text in dialogue with the required reading. Contribute these paragraphs to the Discussions feature on Populi by the beginning of class. Failure to contribute to this discussion will result in a lowered course average.

Papers should be turned in electronically using the Assignments on Populi. When you save and title your paper on your computer, put your last name as the first word in the file name.

GRADING:

First short paper (This paper will be a first draft of the prolegomena section of the credo.

Due September 24): 15%

Second short paper (This paper will be a first draft of the theological anthropology section of the credo. Due October 29): 15%

Final paper (Full credo. Due December 3): 40%

Group report: 15%

Class contribution: 15%

Online discussion is ungraded, but course grade will be lowered if participation is inadequate.

Missing more than 25% of the course will result in a failing grade. Unless an extension has been arranged in advance, late papers will not be accepted.

SCHEDULE:

August 27:

Introduction to the course.

September 3:

Reading: Inbody, preface and chapters 1 and 2 (prolegomena).

September 10: Secondary readings

Reading: Appropriate chapters about prolegomena in the secondary reading you have chosen.

September 17:

Reading: Inbody, chapter 3 (revelation)

September 24:

Reading: Inbody, chapter 4 (God)

First paper due.

October 1:

Reading: Inbody, chapter 5 (creation)

October 8:

Reading: Inbody, chapter 6 (theodicy)

October 15: Fall break, no class.

October 22:

Reading: Inbody, chapter 7 (theological anthropology)

October 29:

Reading: Inbody, chapter 8 (person of Jesus Christ)
Second paper due.

November 5:

Reading: Inbody, chapter 9 (work of Jesus Christ)

November 12:

Reading: Inbody, chapters 10 and 11 (ecclesiology)

November 19:

Reading: Inbody, chapter 12 (eschatology)

November 26: Thanksgiving break, no class

December 3:

Work day for group reports.
Credo due.

December 10:

Group reports.

SOME NOTES ON WRITING A CREDO

- 1) This paper is not a research paper. You will be learning from others in a variety of ways, and you come to this class already informed by the theologians you have encountered in other courses. You may find it helpful to consult certain theologians along the way to see how they have dealt with certain problems, but your task is not to research and document what other people have said about the Christian faith. *Your assignment is to write your own constructive statement which explains your own understanding of the content of the Christian faith.* Your understanding will be formed and informed greatly by your dialogue with others, but your responsibility in this project is to state clearly, concisely, and consistently what you take the content of the Christian faith to be.
- 2) Do not think of this assignment as writing down your own personal beliefs. They could conceivably be quite different from the way that Christians have thought through the ages. Your task is to interpret the content of the Christian faith. The interpretation will be *yours*, and in that sense it will inevitably bear the mark of your own position, but you are responsible for stating not just your own beliefs but what you understand Christian faith to be about. For instance, you may personally believe in reincarnation, but Christian faith speaks instead of resurrection or eternal life. Or, you might not even believe in God or the saving significance of Jesus Christ. To write a credo, though, in which you do not speak in some way about the saving significance of Jesus Christ would be to misrepresent Christian faith. You will become aware that there is great diversity in the way that Christians think about their faith, and this diversity will no doubt be reflected in the positions held in this class.

There is ample room to move around, to consider which position is best, and even to be somewhat creative in how you think. The point of stressing that you are not merely stating your own beliefs is to remind you that you are accountable in this assignment for something beyond yourself. You are not merely speaking for yourself but representing what, in your considered judgment, Christian faith actually is.

- 3) In light of point number (2), keep in mind that you are not writing a sermon or a personal witness. Your own personal experience is important for how you have come to understand the Christian faith, but these assignments should be focused on what you have learned through your theological study of the Christian tradition. You may need to compose an account of your personal story in order to begin to put your ideas together, but your personal story should not become part of the credo (or the papers leading up to it). There is simply not enough room for you to do that and provide the content that is required.
- 4) Also, it is surely important for you to know that your understanding is based in scripture, but quoting scripture at length takes up space that is needed for developing an argument. I advise you to put most references to scripture in the footnotes
- 5) You will need to make some decisions about the things that you will include in this statement and the way that you will include them. A paper of this length may seem daunting at first, but consider everything that “the Christian faith” could conceivably include. You will need to be selective about the things that you consider most important. What is central? What is peripheral? What ideas need development? What ideas deserve mention but cannot be developed fully?
- 6) Be aware, though, that you are responsible for discussing the full scope of Christian thought. You may not be so selective as to leave out a major doctrine, such as ecclesiology. Your selectivity will pertain to the things you think you should include in your discussion of each major doctrine.
- 7) Find a way to organize the ideas that you believe you need to include. You may want to consult several systematic theologies to see what others have done. For instance, you may follow a fairly standard progression of the doctrines from creation to eschatology, or you may follow the form of a creed, etc. The way you organize your paper will be crucial to the success of how you accomplish your task, so you should give this aspect of the assignment a great deal of thought.
- 8) Imagine how much space you can devote to each of the things you want to include. You may have only two or three pages for some topics, four or five for others, depending on how you divide up your space. No doubt, you will realize quickly that there is more to say than you can possibly say in this assignment, but part of the task is to be selective and succinct.
- 9) **BE CONSISTENT!** You should give a great deal of attention to the way that your statements in one area will affect your statements in another. For instance, if you say that the fundamental human problem is the guilt of sin, then the work of Christ will have to affect in some way the removal of guilt. A big part of your job is to construct a coherent statement, so you will have to work hard to see how the pieces fit together.
- 10) If you make use of someone’s ideas explicitly and knowingly in your work, you need to acknowledge your indebtedness to that person through an appropriate citation in a footnote. You should avoid, however, long quotations from other authors. Your task is to construct your own statement, not to repeat what others have said.

- 11) For any topic you take up, you should give some indication that you understand why you are adopting the position that you do. You can do this by showing that you know what the alternatives are, by giving your reasons for the choices you have made, and by indicating the way that the position you take in one area of your paper follows from the position you take in another.
- 12) Define your terms. Words that we often take for granted in our conversations about the Christian faith often have varieties of meanings. Sin, experience, salvation, even “God” can mean different things in different contexts. Perhaps you want to show that a word has several meanings, or perhaps you want to show that you are using this word in this way and not in another commonly used way. In either case, it is important to let me know what you mean when you use this term.
- 13) Work on clarity. This paper should not be written hastily. You should read and reread what you have said, and try to imagine questions that a reader would have about what you have said. It is surely not possible to anticipate every question, but what you say matters and how you say it will determine a good deal of the success you have in communicating your ideas.
- 14) I will look for at least the following as I grade your papers: clarity (are you using language precisely and carefully?), coherence (does your statement “hang together?”), comprehensiveness (have you left out anything really important, such as a description of sin?), and responsibility (do you give reasons for the position you take?).

Please see Student Handbook for sections providing policy details on the following:

ADA—MTSO seeks to remove barriers to inclusion in its learning communities. Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a documented disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs at the beginning of the semester. Please contact the Director of Student Services to coordinate reasonable accommodations for students with documented disabilities. Any accommodation must be agreed upon prior to the due date of the affected course requirement.

Class attendance—Regular attendance is expected in all classes. During unavoidable absences, students are responsible for missed work. An excessive number of absences may result in grade reduction or course failure, despite successful completion of all assigned work. In most cases, a student will not be allowed credit for a course if he or she is absent for 25% of the class sessions. As it relates to blended courses, students may not be allowed credit if they are absent for 25% of class meetings or if 25% of online course work is not completed. Use of Skype or similar technology is not a substitute for attendance in class.

Electronic Devices—Turn mobile devices off or “vibrate only” during class. Browsing the Internet or engaging in email or social network conversations during class is discouraged. Instructors have the right to impose grading penalties for disruptions due to electronic devices.

Human Subjects Research—Research by MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel that collects non-public information from and/or about living individuals or contemporary organizations/groups for purposes of publication or public presentation (including class assignments) must be approved by the Human Subjects Research Committee. MTSO faculty, students, or affiliated personnel should err on the side of caution and apply for committee approval of any activity that may fit this description.

Inclusive Language—In accordance with MTSO’s policy on inclusive language, all students are expected to use gender inclusive or gender neutral language in their writing and in the classroom discussions when referring to human beings.

Incompletes—To receive a course grade of Incomplete, students must submit the petition form from the Registrar with all signatures to the Dean’s Office before the last day of regularly scheduled classes. See Student Handbook for intensive term deadlines. Any petition submitted without a due date for outstanding work will be denied. If work is not complete by the due date the Registrar will record the grade of F for the course.

Pass/Fail—The decision to exercise this option must be made before the end of the second week of the course by completing the appropriate form available through the Registrar. To receive a grade of "pass" the student must do at least the equivalent of C minus work in the course.

Plagiarism—Plagiarism is a serious matter of academic, professional, and personal integrity. All students at the masters level are expected to understand the requirement to provide attribution when the work of others is used. Students are also expected to be familiar with and understand the school’s policy on Academic Misconduct found in the Student Handbook. If students have questions about attribution, citation, and how to avoid plagiarism they should consult the course instructor, the school’s writing instructor, or library staff. When in doubt it is better to provide attribution even if one is uncertain about the proper citation form. Plagiarism is a form of academic misconduct that results in disciplinary actions per the Student Handbook that may range from failing an assignment or course to expulsion.

Updated 8/13/14